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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000579

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [RU](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH "EXPLAIN AND REASSURE" ON TRIP TO RUSSIA

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS

ONS 1.4 B/D

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Barnier and Defense Minister Alliot-Marie visited Russia January 20-21 for bi-annual security consultations with their counterparts. The consultations drew higher-than-expected visibility from the French press, although an MFA contact told us that the meetings followed a standard format and did not result in breakthroughs on either side. The Russians complained about relations with the EU, but seemed more open to discussing Chechnya. The French were concerned by what they considered a "tougher" line by the Russians regarding the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia. Given what they saw as firm Russian rejection of the OSCE's Border Monitoring Operation (BMO) in Georgia, they urged U.S.-EU discussion and agreement on how to respond to Russian concerns while still keeping some BMO capacity. French officials were impressed with Defense Minister Ivanov, and consider him to be a potential successor to President Putin. End summary.

RUSSIA FRUSTRATED WITH EU, OPEN TO DISCUSSING CHECHNYA

[12.](#) (C) On January 27, Poloff met with MFA DAS-equivalent for Russia and the former Soviet space Pierre Cochard to discuss the January 20-21 visit by FM Barnier and MOD Alliot-Marie to Russia. Cochard agreed that the meetings took place under higher-than-normal visibility, and suggested that part of the reason may have been greater interest by the French press given the events that had occurred in Ukraine. When asked if he agreed with the characterization by some in the French press that the two Ministers were sent to Russia to "reassure" the Russians in the aftermath of the Presidential election in Ukraine, Cochard said this was partly the case, but he said that the goal was above all to "explain" French positions. Barnier told his interlocutors that France had wholeheartedly supported the EU's position on Ukraine, while continuing to press the EU to take heed of Russian concerns. According to Cochard, FM Lavrov raised Russian dissatisfaction with the current state of EU-Russia dialogue, comparing it to what he considered a more positive Russia-NATO dialogue. Barnier, said Cochard, took the opportunity to remind Lavrov that the EU was not an international institution like NATO, and that the EU's supra-national authority meant it did not engage with states outside the Union in the same way as an international institution would. Russia could not be a "26th member" of the EU. Plus, Cochard added, everyone knew that Russia-NATO relations were not as rosy as the Russians described them. Barnier did express French openness to discussing a consultative role for Russia in any future EU peacekeeping operations.

[13.](#) (C) Russia continued to bristle at the concept of the EU's "New Neighbor" policy, said Cochard. It raised as well the need for EU attention to the issue of Kaliningrad. On a positive note, Cochard said the French had perceived a slight improvement in Russian willingness to discuss Chechnya, and, he noted, so did the Germans. (Cochard dismissed French press reports comparing Barnier's description of Chechnya as a "crisis" to previous FM Villepin's use of the word "war" as a "semantics game.") Barnier raised three issues with Lavrov concerning Chechnya: NGO access to the area, the need for an inclusive political process and the case of a Russian AFP employee missing in Chechnya. Lavrov said Russia was optimistic that NGOs could be allowed back in to Chechnya and that Russia would negotiate with any Chechen except for Mashkadov and Basayev. Unprompted, Lavrov raised the impunity of Russian soldiers issue, and said that approximately 300 trials had been conducted against Russian military forces. Cochard said the French perceived a greater Russian determination to crack down on violence and criminality by the Russian military stationed in Chechnya.

[14.](#) (C) During a January 26 lunch with the DCM, MFA Political Director Stanislas Lefebvre de Laboulaye (who participated in the "two two" meeting between Foreign Ministers and Defense Ministers in Moscow), said the French side was impressed by Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, who they see as a potential successor to Putin. Laboulaye described the talks as wide-ranging and cordial except for an exchange on the OSCE Secretary General in which Barnier became irritated because

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of Lavrov's snide and dismissive comments about the EU. In their meeting with Putin, said Laboulaye, the French came away with the sense that the Russian President was not thinking strategically, focusing almost exclusively on short-term tactics.

RUSSIANS "DIFFICULT" ON FROZEN CONFLICTS

15. (C) Lavrov raised standard Russian talking points regarding ratification of the CFE treaty, to which Barnier reiterated the standing position that Russia must fulfill its Istanbul commitments. Lavrov said there was no connection between the two. Cochard said this conversation then segued into the presence of Russian troops in the separatist region of Transnistria. The French were taken aback when Lavrov said that even if there was a resolution between Moldova and Transnistria, Russia would not necessarily withdraw its troops. Lavrov said the presence of people in Transnistria with "possible claims to Russian citizenship" meant that Russia would have to keep a long-term presence in the area.

16. (C) The Russians also warned of the "contagion effect" of a potential decision by the international community to grant Kosovo independence. Lavrov specifically cited Abkhazia and Transnistria as two breakaway regions that would most likely declare independence if Kosovo did so. The French believed, said Cochard, that this was a clear signal from the Russians that acquiescing to Kosovo "independence" would result in a quid pro quo of Abkhazia and Transnistria declaring their "independence" as well. Cochard said the "difficult" positions on the frozen conflicts by Lavrov and Ivanov came as a surprise to the French delegation.

THE OSCE AND THE BMO

17. (C) On January 20, the first day of consultations, Barnier asked Lavrov to agree to support the candidacy of French diplomat Marc Perrin de Brichambaut to head the OSCE. At first, Lavrov complained, saying that Europeans were over represented within the OSCE. Later, however, he announced that if Brichambaut was the consensus candidate, Russia would not stand in the way. The following day, said Cochard, Lavrov was more positive, and said that Russia would support Brichambaut's candidacy.

18. (C) Barnier raised three additional issues regarding the OSCE: budgetary questions, the OSCE's election monitoring role and the Border Monitoring Operation (BMO) in Georgia. On all of these questions, said Cochard, the Russians were difficult. Lavrov was "very firm" on Russia's push to reduce its financial contributions to the OSCE, saying this was an "indispensable" issue. Lavrov also questioned the utility of the OSCE's election monitoring role, given that elections in Afghanistan and Iraq were riddled with many more errors than those in the Ukraine and Belarus, and yet the OSCE reserved its harshest judgment for the elections in the latter two. Regarding the BMO, Lavrov described the mission as "overly expensive" and "not useful." Cochard said the French left convinced that Russia would not negotiate its position on the BMO, but that there might be an opening to reorient the BMO towards a training mission, with an initial period that still maintained the BMO's monitoring capabilities. Cochard said there was a split within the EU on how hard to press the Russians regarding the BMO, and that it was of great importance for the U.S. and the EU to form a unified position on the BMO's future role.

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GENERAL AGREEMENT ON OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES
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19. (C) The four ministers also discussed the Middle East, Iran, and UN reform and in general, found broad agreement on these issues, said Cochard. Russia and France agreed to form bilateral working groups to further discuss UN reform and OSCE reform. Barnier raised France's preoccupation with the role Syria plays in Lebanon and the need to preserve Lebanese independence. Lavrov responded that Syria had an important stabilizing role to play in Lebanon and that in general, it believed the "international community" was asking too much of Syria.
Leach